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THE WORLD AS A CONTINUUM: KANTIAN (AND DANTEAN) ECHOES IN GADDA'S
PASTICCIACCIO

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THE WORLD AS A CONTINUUM: KANTIAN (AND DANTEAN) ECHOES IN GADDA'S *PASTICCIACCIO*

'Non datur saltus': Kant, Quantum Physics, and Modernism

The questioning of Ines Cionini, in the seventh chapter of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1957), plays a key role in the solution of both cases investigated in the novel: Liliana Balducci's death, as well as the Menegazzi burglary.¹ Yet, as underlined by the narrator, Ines's involvement in the story is the result of supposedly fortuitous events:

Il caso (non datur casus, non datur saltus) be' viceversa pareva esser proprio lui quella notte a sovvenire i perplessi, a raddrizzare le indagini, mutato spiro il vento: il caso, la fortuna, la rete, un tantinello smagliata, un tantino sfilacciata del pattuglione, più che ogni sagacia d'arte o capillotomica dialessi.²

Gadda's phrasing here is rather ambiguous. On the one hand, the 'non datur casus' principle ('chance does not occur') seems to be contradicted by events, as it is apparently by chance that Ines is brought in for interrogation; on the other, for an author who conceives reality as an entanglement of con-causes, it must be hard to accord the notion of chance any ontological significance whatsoever—in Gadda's view, chance is rather regarded as a product of the human mind, when the links between events are too complex or subtle to be handled by reason.³ As Gadda himself suggests, what has just happened in the seventh chapter *seems* to be accidental ('pareva esser proprio [il caso]')—which does not mean it actually *is*. As will be illustrated shortly, the same applies to the other principle, 'non datur saltus' ('no leap occurs'): as much as Ines being interrogated may look like a leap in the plot, and despite Gadda's own inclination to narrative discontinuity,⁴ the novel ultimately conveys the idea that the world is a continuum, whose elements flow into each other without bounds or interruptions.

¹ On the importance of this episode in the overall structure of the novel, see in particular Ferdinando Amigoni, *La più semplice macchina: lettura freudiana del 'Pasticciaccio'* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1995), pp. 33–56, and Federica Pedriali, *Altre carceri d'invenzione: studi gaddiani* (Ravenna: Longo, 2007), pp. 19–35.

² Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, in *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. II, ed. by Giorgio Pinotti and others (Milan: Garzanti, 1989), p. 185 (henceforth abbreviated in the text as RR, II).

³ The ambiguity of this passage has also been underlined (within a general analysis of causality in *Quer pasticciaccio*) by Raffaele Donnarumma, "Riformare la categoria di causa": Gadda e la costruzione del romanzo, in *Gadda modernista* (Pisa: ETS, 2006), pp. 69–71.

⁴ As pointed out by Federica Pedriali, the ultimate subject of Gadda's œuvre is the world's pervasive (and continuous) 'large plot', which on the other hand can only be hinted at through 'gappy' or discontinuous narratives (Pedriali, 'The Universe Stinks (or Gadda Perfects Our Plot)', *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*, 7, suppl. 9: *Come (non) lavoriamo* (November 2011) <<http://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/journal/supp9decennial/articles/pedrialius09.php>> [accessed 7 January 2015]).

To sum up, the ‘non datur casus’ and ‘non datur saltus’ postulates are not really confuted by the course of events; and more importantly, they are closely related to the philosophical foundations of Gadda’s approach to storytelling. It might be useful, therefore, to focus on the possible sources of this Latin interlude, whose intertextual density has not yet received any critical attention. First of all, ‘non datur saltus’ obviously evokes the scholastic formula ‘natura non facit saltum’, also reprised by Leibniz in his *Nouveaux essais* (the subject of Gadda’s unfinished philosophy dissertation): ‘Tout va par degrés dans la nature et rien par saut, et cette règle, à l’égard des changements, est une partie de ma loi de la continuité’ (‘Everything goes by degrees in nature, and nothing by leaps, and this rule of changes is part of my law of continuity’).⁵ A closer source, however, can be found in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, where both Latin expressions are employed in the same passage:

The proposition that nothing happens through blind chance (*in mundo non datur casus*) is therefore an *a-priori* law of nature. So also is the proposition that no necessity in nature is blind, but always a conditioned and therefore intelligible necessity (*non datur fatum*). [. . .] The principle of continuity forbids any leap in the series of appearances, that is, of alterations (*in mundo non datur saltus*); it also forbids, in respect of the sum of all empirical intuitions in space, any gaps or cleft between two appearances (*non datur hiatus*); for so we may express the proposition, that nothing which proves a vacuum, or which even admits it as a part of empirical synthesis, can enter into experience [. . .]. [These propositions] are all entirely at one in this, that they allow of nothing in the empirical synthesis which may do violence or detriment to the understanding and to the continuous connection of all appearances—that is, to the unity of the concepts of the understanding.⁶

Not surprisingly, in Gadda’s reading copy of the *Critique* (now held at the Fondo Roscioni in Milan) this passage is extensively underlined; moreover, the expression ‘non datur saltus’ will later recur in Gadda’s marginalia to Kant’s Dialectic.⁷

It really makes sense that, at such a pivotal point in the story, Gadda should once again refer to ‘Emmanuele Kant’, who had already been mentioned as one of Ciccio Ingravallo’s philosophical models in the first pages of *Quer pasticciaccio* (RR, II, 16). As is also the case with other aspects of Kant’s thought,⁸ the idea of the world’s ‘continuity’ and ‘constant connection’

⁵ Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l’entendement humain*, IV. 16. 12.

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Analytic, II. 2. 3, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 248–49 (emphasis original).

⁷ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique de la raison pure*, trans. by Jules R. Barni (Paris: Flammarion, n.d.), I, 244–45, and II, 109, respectively. Gadda’s annotations date back to 1923–29. In commenting on the latter passage, beside Kant’s assertion that nothing in the world is without cause, Gadda writes: ‘No miracolo (non datur saltum [*sic*])’. I am grateful to Dr Isabella Fiorentini (Director of the Archivio Storico Civico e Biblioteca Trivulziana) and to Dr Stefano Dalla Via (Laboratorio di Restauro) for granting me access to the Fondo.

⁸ The intention of *reforming* Kant is openly attributed to Ingravallo in the incipit of *Pasticciaccio*:

is heavily *reformed* by Gadda; yet its influence is far from being negligible. Further evidence on this point is provided by another passage of the *Analytic of Principles*, where the law of 'non datur saltus' is discussed in detail:

Between reality in the field of appearance and its negation there is therefore a continuity of many possible intermediate sensations [. . .]. The property of magnitudes by which no part of them is the smallest possible, that is, by which no part is simple, is called their continuity. Space and time are *quanta continua* [. . .]. Such magnitudes may also be called *flowing*, since the synthesis of productive imagination involved in their production is a progression in time, and the continuity of time is ordinarily designated by the term *fluere*. [. . .] A phenomenon as unity is a *quantum*, and as a quantum is always a *continuum*.⁹

This passage is of interest for several reasons. First, Kant is referring here to Leibniz's account of *petites perceptions*—a notion Gadda was certainly well acquainted with, as documented for instance by *L'Adalgisa*;¹⁰ besides, the semantic area of *fluere* is quite pervasive in Gadda's writings as well, albeit in slightly different (and more markedly Heraclitean) terms.¹¹ Lastly, and most importantly, Kant's use of the word *quantum* (actually a recurring term in this section of the *Critique*) cannot escape the attention of readers familiar with *Pasticciaccio*.

To be sure, as has been noticed, Ingravallo's theories on the 'quanto di erotia' draw on the vocabulary of quantum physics.¹² Nonetheless, Kant's *quanta continua* must have exerted an additional and crucial influence on the detective's terminology; as a matter of fact, Gadda seems to notice a paradoxical compatibility between Kantian physics and the works of Schrödinger and Heisenberg, thus anticipating *in nuce* a fairly recent trend in the philosophy

'L'opinione che bisognasse "riformare in noi il senso della categoria di causa" quale avevamo dai filosofi, da Aristotele o da Emmanuele Kant, e sostituire alla causa le cause, era in lui un'opinione centrale e persistente' (RR, II, 16). On Gadda's original and problematic interpretation of Kant, see Federico Bertoni, *La verità sospetta: Gadda e l'invenzione della realtà* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), pp. 85–93, and Guido Lucchini, 'Gli studi filosofici di C. E. Gadda (1924–1929)', *Strumenti critici*, 75 (1994), 223–45.

⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Analytic, II. 2. 3, trans. by Kemp Smith, pp. 343–47.

¹⁰ "Les petites perceptions" nella psicologia di Leibniz, (*Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement Humain*), sono incrementi infinitesimi nella vita dell'essere individuo, causali inavvertite della scelta' (*L'Adalgisa*, in *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. I, ed. by Raffaella Rodondi and others (Milan: Garzanti, 1988), p. 559).

¹¹ On Gadda's fascination with the semantic area of flowing, and its Heraclitean implications, see Mario Porro, 'Accenni eraclei nell'ontologia di Gadda', *Edinburgh Journal of Gadda Studies*, 7, suppl. 9: *Come (non) lavoriamo* (November 2011) <<http://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/journal/supp9decennial/articles/porroaccenni09.php>> [accessed 7 January 2015]; see also Pedriali, *Altre carceri d'invenzione*, pp. 105–63, and Giulio de Jorio Frisari, *Carlo Emilio Gadda filosofo milanese* (Bari: Palomar, 1996), pp. 211–38.

¹² Gabriele Frasca, *Un quanto di erotia: Gadda con Freud e Schrödinger* (Naples: Edizioni D'If, 2011).

of science.¹³ The very juxtaposition of the Kantian mottos ‘non datur casus’ and ‘non datur saltus’, incidentally, implies a binary conception of the phenomenal world, in a way similar to the wave–particle duality: reality is both an entanglement of *quanta discreta* tied together by multiple causality (‘non datur casus’) and at the same time a stream of *quanta continua*, restlessly flowing one into the other (‘non datur saltus’). Quite emblematically, in his 1929 annotation to Kant’s statement that every *quantum* can be simultaneously considered as *continuum* and *discretum*, Gadda openly refers to ‘atomi’ and ‘molecole’:

La division infinie ne désigne que le phénomène comme *quantum continuum* [. . .]. Mais dès que quelque chose est considérée comme un *quantum discretum*, la multitude des unités y est déterminée [. . .]. Il n’y a donc que l’expérience qui puisse décider jusqu’où l’organisation peut aller dans un corps organisé. [Gadda’s annotation: ‘Bene | Atomi, molecole’]¹⁴

Infinite divisibility only defines a phenomenon as a *quantum continuum* [. . .]. But when we consider something as a *quantum discretum*, the multitude of its units is determined [. . .]. Therefore, experience alone can decide the depth to which organization may penetrate an organized body.

The importance of the Analytics of Principles as a model for Gadda’s reflection on continuity is also confirmed by the chapter ‘La materia e la molteplicità’, from *Meditazione milanese* (1928): ‘Deferito alla sostanza il compito del *permanere*, [. . .] notammo esser ella cognata alla deformazione nel *divenire*: notiamo della materia esser cognata al molteplice coattuale, alla deformazione nel *simultaneo*.’¹⁵ Not only is the definition of substance as ‘permanere’ typically Kantian (as observed by Roscioni),¹⁶ but the very distinction between ‘permanere’, ‘divenire’, and ‘simultaneo’ as the three possible configurations of matter derives from Kant’s Analytics, where the ‘Analogies of Experience’ are arranged according to the three ‘modalities’ of time: permanence, transformation, and simultaneity. This part of the *Critique*, too, is extensively glossed and underlined in the Fondo Roscioni copy, including a brief recapitulation: ‘sostanza=permanenza | causa=cambiamento | azione reciproca=simultaneità’.¹⁷

¹³ See in particular Stephen R. Palmquist, ‘Kantian Causality and Quantum Quarks: The Compatibility between Quantum Mechanics and Kant’s Phenomenal World’, *Theoria*, 28 (2013), 283–302; Michel Bitbol, ‘Reflective Metaphysics: Understanding Quantum Mechanics from a Kantian Standpoint’, *Philosophica*, 83 (2010), 53–83; Shahen Hacyan, ‘Einstein’s “Spooky Actions at a Distance” in the Light of Kant’s Transcendental Doctrine of Space and Time’, *AIP Conference Proceedings*, 861 (2006), 1117–19.

¹⁴ Kant, *Critique de la raison pure*, trans. by Barni, II, 87.

¹⁵ Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Meditazione milanese*, in *Scritti vari e postumi*, ed. by Andrea Silvestri and others (Milan: Garzanti, 1993), pp. 878–79 (emphasis added).

¹⁶ Gian Carlo Roscioni, ‘Commento’, in Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Meditazione milanese* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p. 319.

¹⁷ Kant, *Critique de la raison pure*, trans. by Barni, I, 230.

Going back to *Pasticciaccio*, the new Kantian intertext allows us to reconsider some distinguishing features of Gadda's novel—especially if we concentrate on the undertones of 'non datur saltus', which can now be connected to Kant's view of space and time as a constant flow of *quanta*. The phenomenal world of *Quer pasticciaccio* is actually often represented as a continuum: suffice it to mention Gadda's perception of language as a metamorphic flux ('deflusso'),¹⁸ as documented by his massive use of paronomasia and word deformation, or the Protean quality of Pestalozzi's dream in the eighth chapter; or again, the blurring of gender boundaries in the description of several characters, both major (Liliana, Virginia, Angeloni) and minor (Assunta's father, Veronica Migliarini, and even Santarella's gramophone),¹⁹ as well as the passing references to calculus, i.e. 'continuità nel senso infinitesimale del termine' (RR, II, 260; see also RR, II, 153, 'l'integrale dei fuggenti attimi è l'ora'). On a different level, the law of continuity also applies to Gadda's handling of the notion of moral responsibility, as the numberless nuances between guilt and innocence make it impossible for the reader of *Pasticciaccio* to separate the culprits clearly from the victims; indeed, guilt in the novel manifests itself as a common burden, a 'gravame comune', as stated in the 1954 essay 'L'Egoista'.²⁰

To sum up, Kant is reinterpreted by Gadda in quintessentially modernist terms, inasmuch as the framing of reality as a chaotic flux (as opposed to the stiffness of human reason) similarly—and all too obviously—characterizes several other classics of European Modernism: from Proust's Bergsonian view of time to Pirandello's 'forma' vs. 'vita' antinomy, from Joyce's and Woolf's

¹⁸ The word 'deflusso' is used with reference to the linguistic process leading from the surname 'Menegazzi' to its popular deformation 'Menecacci': 'L'anafonesi trivellava il deflusso col perforante vigore d'un'anguilla o di certi pesci anadromi che sanno chilometrare all'insù, su, su, su, fino a ribevere le linfe natali' (RR, II, 51).

¹⁹ Liliana's 'paternità metafisica' (RR, II, 107), Virginia's 'voce d'omo' (RR, II, 152), and the simile between commendator Angeloni and 'una vedova' (RR, II, 44) are all fine cases in point. With regard to Assunta's father, Veronica, and the gramophone, see respectively RR, II, 273 ('Non si capiva [. . .] s'era un omo o una donna, cui nel procedere fra le consolazioni della prole e della zappa [. . .] le fosse spuntata una barba: una maschia barba'), RR, II, 274 ('La vecchia [. . .] teneva una mano in una mano, da parer Còsimo pater patriae nel cosiddetto ritratto del Pontormo'), and RR, II, 155 ('Il meraviglioso ordigno si tramutava cioè, con la più perfetta disinvoltura, di maschio in femmina e viceversa'). On this subject cf. Rodica Diaconescu-Blumenfeld, *Born Illiterate: Gender and Representation in Gadda's 'Pasticciccio'* (Market Harborough: Troubador, 1999), and Manuela Marchesini, 'Literature as the Experience of Boundary Crossing: Gadda's Descent into Hell and the Solution to *That Awful Mess on via Merulana*', *MLN*, 119 (2004), 109–34.

²⁰ 'Al dogma della messa in comune de' titoli di merito dei Santi per la comune salvezza, corrisponde, in reciproca, il riconoscimento dostoevskiano del *gravame comune delle colpe: sì che la colpa di uno è colpa di tutti*. Il tiranno, l'omicida, il ladro, è colpevole nel consenso di tutti, nell'adulazione, o nella invidia o nella indulgenza di tutti' (Carlo Emilio Gadda, 'L'Egoista', in *Saggi Giornali Favole e altri scritti*, vol. 1, ed. by Liliana Orlando and others (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), p. 655 (henceforth abbreviated in the text as SGF, 1). The pervasive nature of guilt in *Quer pasticciaccio* has been underlined by, among others, Donnarumma ('"Riformare la categoria di causa"') and Frasca (*Un quanto di erotia*).

use of stream of consciousness to Musil's dialogue with Mach's physics. It is worth noting, in this regard, the convergence between *Pasticciaccio's* 'non datur saltus' and a page from Musil's *The Man without Qualities*:

Moosbrugger was one of those borderline cases known to jurisprudence and forensic medicine, and indeed even to laymen, as cases of diminished responsibility. [. . .] *Natura non facit saltus*, she does nothing by leaps and bounds; she prefers gradual transitions and on a large scale too keeps the world in a transitional state between imbecility and sanity. But jurisprudence takes no notice of this. It says: *non datur tertium sive medium inter duo contradictoria*; in plain English: the individual is either capable of acting contrary to law or he is not, for between two contraries there is no third or middle term. [. . .] The psychiatrists distinguish between incurable mental diseases and such as by the help of God in time become better of their own accord, and, finally, such as the doctor, admittedly, cannot cure either but which the patient could have avoided [. . .]. This second and third group supply those merely inferior sufferers whom the angel of medicine does of course treat as patients when they come to him in his private practice, but whom he shyly leaves to the angel of the law when he encounters them in his forensic practice.²¹

The continuity principle is applied here to the field of jurisprudence; Ulrich criticizes the sentence imposed on Moosbrugger on account of its implied lack of respect for the infinite middle terms between lucidity and insanity, and consequently between guilt and innocence. The gap between the law and the continuum of moral responsibility is certainly one of Gadda's favourite themes as well, as shown not only by his major novels (*Pasticciaccio* and *Cognizione*), but also—and more pertinently—by his preparatory sketches for *Novella seconda* (1928), whose subject bears a striking resemblance to Moosbrugger's case. Gadda's unfinished novella is based on the real-life story of Renzo Pettine, a matricide whose partial insanity ('semi-infermità mentale') went unrecognized by the judge:

È noto che i giurati hanno ritenuto il giovane sano di mente, gli hanno negato *persino* la semi-infermità. [. . .] Ma ho l'impressione che un'eccessiva durezza di giudizio ha colpito lo sciagurato e che si doveva concedergli larghe attenuanti e *certamente* la semi-infermità mentale. [. . .] 'Demenza' non vuol dire soltanto lingua piovente, andatura da paralitico, discorso da cretino. Si può essere dementi anche nelle facoltà superiori, conservando larghe possibilità fisiche, fisiologiche e locomotrici. (*Novella seconda*, RR, II, 1314–17)

Gadda's particular affinity with Musil, in the wider context of European Modernism, also extends to the importance they both attach to reason as the only possible (if limited) way to investigate reality. In jurisprudence as in all other aspects of human cognition, rational analysis—Ingravallo's 'capilotomica dialessi'—must try to find its way through chaos, even though the

²¹ Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, trans. by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser (London: Secker & Warburg, 1953), I, 287–88.

world's metamorphic complexity cannot be fully grasped by classical logic.²² As declared in *Novella seconda*, judges cannot refrain from judging: 'Il mondo, quando ha rovinato le creature, si apparta, sornione. E lascia che nel povero cuore le cose camminino da sé e maturino da sé, senza parere. È quando i magistrati devono giudicare (e non possono non giudicare)' (RR, II, 1061). The refusal of irrationalism is also Gadda's main point of difference from Bergson, who nonetheless did exert an influence on him in other respects.²³ Needless to say, however, *Pasticciaccio* abounds in moments where reason loosens its grip, and both the author and the detectives surrender to the exhilarating flux of reality; the best case in point is probably the well-known dream of Pestalozzi, where Gadda's meditation on continuity is once more underpinned by a rich intertextual substratum.

Thunderbolts and Ivies: Dante in Pestalozzi's Dream

After being introduced during Ines's interrogation, the idea that 'in mundo non datur saltus' is further developed in the following chapters. As the focus of the novel and of the investigations shifts towards Due Santi, the reader enters a dimension in which nature's continuity becomes all the more apparent: the discreteness of conventional time ('tempo di Cesare e di Gregorio' (RR, II, 195)) seems to be suspended, the interconnection of life's possibilities finds its metaphor in the messy workplace of a seamstress/madam/witch, the world reveals its latent pandemonism ('muta forza o presenza in un pandemonismo della campagna' (RR, II, 235)), and even gender distinctions are called into question ('non si capiva [. . .] s'era un uomo o una donna' (RR, II, 273)). The dream recalled by brigadiere Pestalozzi at the beginning of Chapter 8 is indeed a perfect prelude to this section of the novel, with its blurring of all boundaries between separate beings into a state of Freudian condensation: the thief, who had already been compared to a mouse at the beginning of the novel ('me pareva come un sorcio quando scappeno' (RR, II, 36)), now becomes a 'topazio/topazzo', hence a 'topo'. By weakening the analytical faculties of rational thought, dreams are an amplified version of reality's Protean flux; the centrality of this motif throughout the episode is suggested not only

²² The similarity between Gadda's and Musil's respective approaches to knowledge and complexity is also highlighted by Federico Bertoni, 'Il groviglio conoscitivo e la struttura del romanzo: tra Musil e Gadda' (Mémoire conclusif, Université de Genève: Faculté des Lettres, D.E.S. Littérature et Esthétique, 1996–97). I am grateful to Federico Bertoni for allowing me to access this as yet unpublished work, which represents to date the only systematic study of this subject.

²³ For a general discussion of Gadda's possible debts to Bergson, see Mario Porro, 'Accenni eraclitei'; Porro, 'Networks and Knots: The Discrete and the Continuous in Literature. Italo Calvino and Carlo Emilio Gadda', in *Literature and Science in Italian Culture: From Dante to Calvino*, ed. by Pierpaolo Antonello and Simon Gilson (London: Legenda, 2004), pp. 254–75; and de Jorio Frisari, *Carlo Emilio Gadda filosofo milanese*, pp. 211–38.

by the restless transformations of its elusive subject, but also by a series of subtler allusions.

One hint is provided by the lines that immediately precede the oneiric sequence:

dando di clacson addosso a un oco, il quale indugiava a paperar di culo nella via, stritolò una mezza bestemmia fra i denti: fu allora proprio che gli riemerse e rilampeggiò nella mente, allucinata dal risveglio a ora presta, l'interminabile sogno della notte. (RR, II, 192)

The fact that Pestalozzi's memory is set in motion by the sudden appearance of a gander ('oco') is by no means accidental: on the one hand, the name of the bird is an allusion to Gadda's anagrammatic pen-name in *Eros e Priapo* (originally written in 1944–45), Ali Oco de Madrigal; on the other, it sounds like a cryptic anticipation of the obscene contents of the dream. 'Oco', or more exactly its pejorative 'ocazzo', is generally considered to be the etymological origin of the swear word 'cazzo'—not by chance, Gadda joked about this bizarre lexical connection in a letter of 1948 to Gianfranco Contini:

Il volo pasquativo dei cigni-ocazzi e delle fulgide e soavemente correggesche divaricazioni di poppe-chiappe ha lietamente oltreché stupendamente arriso alla mia Pasqua pocolieta di cigno, [. . .] piuttosto oco e nemmeno, hélas, ocazzo, come dich'io.²⁴

In a word, the escapade of the Ossolian Pestalozzi ('quel nome ossolano e carabinierico' (RR, II, 442)) significantly begins with a probable wink at Domodossola's most illustrious philologist. But more importantly, it begins with a symbolic metamorphosis—an innocuous bird suddenly turns into something obscene, just as Menegazzi's topaz will later turn into a skittish (and rather indecent) mouse.

Gadda's emphasis on the oneiric amplification of life's continuum is confirmed by his multiple (if largely undetected) references to the most famous dream narrative in Italian literature—namely Dante's *Commedia*, and the *Inferno* in particular. The intertextual dialogue starts when the *topo* sneaks towards the 'gore senza foce del Campo Morto' (RR, II, 192; cf. 'morta gora', *Inf.* VIII. 31), and becomes all the more systematic when it reaches Castel Porcano. An indicative example is the scene in which the rodent spreads panic among the 'contessa Circia' and her girls:

Piombatogli in quel punto tra le gambe come la nera fólgor e d'ogni solletico e d'ogni nero evenire, il topaccio pazzo aveva impaurato a un tratto le belle. [. . .] Ed erano gridi ed acuti da non dire mentre saettava qua e là il baffone come cocca di balestra, nera acuminata polpetta. (RR, II, 193, emphasis added)

The 'nera fólgor' is an echo of the monstrous mutations inflicted on two

²⁴ Carlo Emilio Gadda and Gianfranco Contini, *Carteggio 1934–1963*, ed. by Dante Isella and others (Milan: Garzanti, 2009), p. 143.

thieves, namely Buoso and Francesco Cavalcanti—the latter, under the shape of a black snake ('livido e nero come gran di pepe'), attacks the former as quickly as a lizard, which in turn is compared to a thunderbolt ('folgore par se la via attraversa' (*Inf.* xxv. 81)).²⁵ Likewise, the parallel between the mouse and an arrow ('cocca di balestra') is a homage to Geryon's famous exit in *Inf.* xvii ('si dileguò come da corda cocca' (l. 136)); another Infernal monster is evoked, incidentally, when Circia begs for the help 'del Papa, del Papè, del grande Aleppo' (*RR*, II, 194), in an obvious allusion to Pluto in *Inf.* vii. 1 ('Pape Satàn, pape Satàn aleppe'). Lastly, Gadda leads us back to the twenty-fifth canto when the *topo* climbing up Circia's thighs is compared to ivy:

Lo spiritato ratto aveva infilato quella via, [. . .] le rampicava ora le cosce come un'edera, grasso e nel suo terrore fremente, la faceva ridere a cascatella grulla, smaniare dal solletico. (*RR*, II, 194)

Both *cosce* and *edera* come from the episode in which another thief-turned-snake, Cianfa Donati, assaults Agnolo Brunelleschi:

li diretani e le *cosce* distese,
e miseli la coda tra 'mbedue
e dietro per le ren su la ritese.
Ellera abbarbicata mai non fue
ad alber sì, come l'orribil fiera
per l'altrui membra avviticchiò le sue.
(*Inf.* xxv. 55–60, emphasis added)

The amount and relevance of the allusions to *Inferno* in Pestalozzi's dream are probably unmatched in the long history of Gadda's Dantism.²⁶ The idea of a subtle *clin d'œil* to the author's Ossolian friend, Gianfranco Contini, does

²⁵ This episode is actually echoed in many of Gadda's works. The earliest example can be found in a 1932 essay on Montale: 'talora si dilunga o vacilla, [. . .] tal'altra ràpido e lùcido ci dà il guizzo del ramarro dantesco' (*SGF*, I, 770). It is worth noting, incidentally, that Gadda's remarks pre-date Montale's Dantean *mottetto* 'Il ramarro se scocca...'. Further references occur in the article 'Carrara', 1934 ('folti e verdi cespi accolgono la malinconia meridiana della cicala, e vi fruscia e ne guizza il ramarro' (*SGF*, I, 176–77)), in the eighth chapter of *Cognizione* ('il ramarro-folgore a meditare il suo guizzo' (*RR*, I, 731)), in the short story 'Prima divisione della notte' ('veneravo l'irraggiungibile guizzo del ramarro che ogni volta, a metà del sentiero, mi traversava il passo come una folgore verde, genius loci' (*RR*, II, 873)), and lastly in *Primo libro delle favole* ('e vi dà guizzo, tal fiata, da poterne asconder suo lampo allora ch'è in canicula meriggio fitto, alcuno inaurato ramarro' (*Saggi Giornali Favole e altri scritti*, vol. II, ed. by Claudio Vela and others (Milan: Garzanti, 1992), p. 67)).

²⁶ With regard to Dante's general influence on Gadda, see especially: Cristina Savettieri, 'Il ventennio di Gadda', in *Scrittori italiani tra fascismo e antifascismo*, ed. by Romano Luperini and Pietro Cataldi (Pisa: Pacini, 2009), pp. 1–33; Paola Italia, *Glossario di Carlo Emilio Gadda 'milanese'* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1998), pp. xxviii–xxxii; and Luigi Scorrano, 'Dante in Gadda', in *Presenza verbale di Dante nella letteratura italiana del Novecento* (Ravenna: Longo, 1994), pp. 157–63.

not seem sufficient to explain such an intertextual peak; the thematic affinity between Gadda's text and its source must have been at least as important a factor. To start with, the episode at issue here is the recollection of a dream—a pattern for which Dante's *Commedia* stands out as a paramount archetype. Secondly, the Dantesque substratum reinforces the notion that Pestalozzi's descent to the periphery is actually a journey to Hell: similarly, the indications given to Ingravallo to reach La Pavona are rich in Infernal place names (from 'Casal Bruciato' to 'Ardea', as in *ardere*, and then on to the lake of 'Solforata' (RR, II, 269)). Thirdly, it is worth noting that all three cantos evoked during Pestalozzi's dream share a direct link to the semantic area of money, being respectively dedicated to hoarders and squanderers (*Inf.* VII), usurers (*Inf.* XVII), and thieves (*Inf.* XXV); the Dantean paradigm, in short, seems to strengthen the novel's systematic association between money and damnation—an association already suggested by the demonic features of the prime suspect ('quella c'ha Farfarello in corpo' (RR, II, 136)), as well as by the description of the victims' riches as 'l'oro del diavolo' (RR, II, 71). But most importantly, one should underline Gadda's evident fascination with the transformations portrayed in *Inferno* XXV; by alluding to the most metamorphic of Dante's cantos,²⁷ Gadda reinterprets his model in the light of his own vision of the world as a chaotic stream of *quanta continua*, upon which human reason is nonetheless called to judge. Not by chance, in the chapter of *Meditazione milanese* dedicated to matter and multiplicity, Gadda referred to Dante's moral sense ('schema etico del giudizio dantesco') as an ideal combination between rational judgement and the awareness of the world's ever-changing variety.²⁸ On the other hand, the firmness of Dante's verdicts, i.e. his rigid separation between Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, is simply unattainable in the world of *Quer pasticciaccio*—a world in which *non datur saltus*, and where judgement is always undermined by uncertainty, as famously suggested by the last word of the novel: 'quasi' (RR, II, 276).

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²⁷ The transformations of *Inferno* XXV are briefly mentioned by Manuela Marchesini as a possible model for Pestalozzi's dream, within a broader reading of *Pasticciaccio* as a quest for knowledge in a metamorphic world: 'The carabinieri [. . .] has dreamt of a bright yellow topaz undergoing a series of Dantesque metamorphoses; after all, perpetual transformation is Dante's punishment for thieves' (Marchesini, 'Literature as the Experience of Boundary Crossing', p. 120).

²⁸ Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Scritti vari e postumi*, ed. by Dante Isella and others (Milan: Garzanti, 1993), p. 889.